

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5239
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

UNCLAS TEL AVIV 1790

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TAGS: PFOR, IS
SUBJECT: PRESS REACTION TO PRESIDENT'S PRESS CONFERENCE

REF: TEL AVIV 1729

1. IN KEEPING WITH THE EXTENSIVE REPORTING OF RABIN'S
VISIT THERE HAS BEEN HEAVY MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE
PRESIDENT'S PRESS CONFERENCE WITH ELABORATE COMMENTARY.
ISRAELIS FIRST REGISTERED SURPRISE,
PARTICULARLY AT THE ALACRITY WITH WHICH THE PRESIDENT'S
STATEMENTS ON "DEFENSIBLE BORDERS" FOLLOWED THE
RABIN TALKS, AND THEN DISAPPOINTMENT AT THE PRESIDENT'S
USE OF "MINOR ADJUSTMENTS" IN HIS CLARIFICATION OF
ISRAEL'S FINAL BORDERS.

2. TYPICAL OF THE GLOOM HAS HAARETZ' REPORT ON MARCH 10
OF SENIOR SOURCES IN JERUSALEM EXPRESSING "PROFOUND
DISAPPOINTMENT...GRAVE DOUBTS...A REVIVAL OF THE ROGERS
PLAN" UPON LEARNING OF THE CONTENTS OF THE PRESS
CONFERENCE. IN A SIMILAR VEIN MAARIV EDITORIALIZED
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THAT "BEING AN HONEST AND STRAIGHT FORWARD MAN, THE
U.S. PRESIDENT DID NOT ALLOW HIS EXPRESSIONS OF FRIEND-
SHIP TO FOSTER ANY POLITICAL ILLUSIONS. BEFORE RABIN'S
VISIT CAME TO AN END, CARTER MADE IT CLEAR THAT HIS
ADMINISTRATION STILL STOOD BY THE OLD ROGERS PLAN,
WHILE ISRAELI DEFENSE NEEDS WOULD HAVE TO BE SATISFIED
BY DEMILITARIZED AREAS, INTERNATIONAL FORCES AND

WARNING STATIONS ALONG THE BORDERS...ONE CAN HARDLY EXPECT ANY ARAB STATESMEN TO AGREE TO CONCESSIONS BEYOND THE CARTER PLAN. NEEDLESS TO SAY, THE U.S. PLAN DOES NOT MEET ISRAEL'S MINIMAL SECURITY NEEDS." THE STATEMENT "CONSTITUTES A GRAVE THREAT TO THE ACTUAL PROSPECTS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS. THE CARTER PLAN MAY ENCOURAGE THE INFLEXIBLE ARAB TRENDS AND IT SEEMS IMPROBABLE THAT ISRAEL WILL BE ABLE TO ACCEPT THE PRINCIPLES OF SUCH A PLAN AS A BASIS FOR NEGOTIATION." PROBABLY THE MOST EXTREME PRESS REACTION WAS YEDYOT AHARONOT'S, WHICH CALLED THE STATEMENT A "DISASTER." IT FOUND "NO OTHER WAY TO DESCRIBE THE CARTER STATEMENTS, WHICH ARE A RETURN TO THE ROGERS PLAN AND WHICH HE HAS DISINTERRED."

3. IN ADDITION TO THE FREQUENT COMPARISONS WITH THE ROGERS PLAN, THERE WERE MANY WHO READ THE BROOKINGS REPORT IN THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENTS. THUS, DAVAR (BARNEA) NOTES THAT NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR BRZEZINSKI WAS ONE OF THE SIGNATORIES OF THE BROOKINGS REPORT "WHOSE RECOMMENDATIONS PRESIDENT CARTER PRACTICALLY ADOPTED YESTERDAY," AND REPORTS THAT ISRAELIS WHO ATTENDED THE CARTER/RABIN TALKS "GAINED THE IMPRESSION THAT BRZEZINSKI IS THE PROPELLING FORCE BEHIND WHITE HOUSE DECISIONS THAT ARE UNWELCOME TO ISRAEL."

4. SCHWEITZER, WRITING IN HAARETZ ON MARCH 11, SUMS UP THE REPEATED COMPARISONS TO THE ROGERS PLAN AND THE BROOKINGS REPORT. "PRESIDENT CARTER'S REMARKS AT UNCLASSIFIED

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HIS WEDNESDAY PRESS CONFERENCE MUST HAVE SPOILED RABIN'S HIGH SPIRITS...THE PRESIDENT REVERTED TO THE ROGERS PLAN PRINCIPLE ON THE PEACE BORDERS AND SOME SAY CARTER ADOPTED THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE 1975 BROOKINGS REPORT. NO ONE IN HIS RIGHT MIND WILL BLAME RABIN FOR THE PRESIDENT'S BELIEFS OR THE MOMENT CHOSEN TO AIR THEM, YET PUBLIC OPINION WILL MIX THINGS UP, SAYING IRSEL'S 'MR. AMERICA' HAS LEFT WASHINGTON DISAPPOINTED AND SOUR FACED...CARTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE REMARKS HAVE DAMAGED THE LABOR PARTY'S (ELECTION) PROSPECTS...REGARDING THE BORDERS, THE US IS INCLINED TOWARDS THE ARABS; WITH REGARD TO THE CONTENTS OF THE SETTLEMENT, THE TENDENCY IS PRO-ISRAEL."

5. HAARETZ ON MARCH 11 ALSO QUOTED ADMINISTRATION SOURCES AS SAYING THAT CARTER'S "CLARIFYING REMARKS" WERE MADE IN THE WAKE OF PRESSURE EXERTED BY THE ARAB COUNTRIES AND NOTED THAT ARAB DIPLOMATS IN WASHINGTON HAVE EXPRESSED SATISFACTION WITH THE

PRESIDENT'S STATEMENTS CONCERNING WITHDRAWAL TO THE 1967 LINES. THE ARTICLE CONTINUES THAT STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS FELT "THAT CARTER WENT TOO FAR IN GOING INTO SUCH DETAIL...AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE."

6. MARGALIT'S COLUMN IN HAARETZ REPORTS THAT THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT REGARDING "MINOR ADJUSTMENTS" WAS NOT NEW IN US POLICY AND HAD IN FACT BEEN AIRED IN HIS PRIVATE TALKS WITH RABIN. THE SLIGHT TO RABIN WAS IN THE FACT THAT CARTER BROKE THE UNWRITTEN UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE US AND ISRAEL THAT AMERICAN OFFICIALS WOULD REFRAIN FROM SUPPORTING THE ROGERS PLAN IN PUBLIC.

7. ON THE OTHER HAND, THOSE VIEWING THE RABIN VISIT IN ITS ENTIRETY PUT A MUCH BETTER FACE ON US POLICY TOWARDS ISRAEL. THUS, AL HAMISHMAR ON MARCH 11 UNCLASSIFIED

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EDITORIALIZED THAT "PRESIDENT CARTER NOT ONLY MADE STATEMENTS OF MORAL VALUE BUT ALSO MET ISRAEL HALF WAY ON ISSUES ON THE AGENDA OF THE APPROACHING MIDDLE EAST NEGOTIATIONS FOR SETTLEMENT. WHEN DEFINING 'DEFENSIBLE BORDERS' CARTER ALSO APPROACHED THE ISRAELI POSITION. EVEN THOUGH EFFORTS WERE LATER MADE TO MINIMIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF THAT DEFINITION, THERE IS NO IGNORING THE FACT THAT IT WAS STATED PUBLICLY AND WAS APRESIDENTIAL RECOGNITION OF ISRAEL'S SECURITY NEEDS, NOT NECESSARILY WITHIN HER FORMER BORDERS."

8. RABIN HIMSELF IS REPORTED IN DAVAR (BARNEA) OF MARCH 11 AS PLAYING DOWN THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS WHEN HE SPOKE OF ALMOST TOTAL ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL. RABIN "WOULD WAIT AND SEE WHAT HAPPENED IN WASHINGTON WHEN ARAB LEADERS LEARN HOW CLOSE THE US FORMULA WAS TO THAT OF ISRAEL."

9. OTHER ISRAELI LEADERS WERE QUOTED AS FOLLOWS IN THE MARCH 10 EVENING TELEVISION NEWS: LABOR MK YTIZHAK BEN-AHARON: "CARTER'S ANNOUNCEMENT ENSURES IDENTIFICATION WITH ISRAEL'S BASIC INTERESTS"; NRP LEADER YOSEF BURG--"I DO NOT THINK THAT THE PRIME MINISTER TRAVELLED TO THE UNITED STATES TO RETURN WITH THE ROGERS PLAN IN HIS POCKET"; DMC LEADER SHMUEL TAMIR--"CARTER'S DECLARATION IS A DISAPPOINTMENT...THERE IS ONE POSITIVE POINT, AND THAT IS THE WILLINGNESS TO ACT TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE PEACE AGREEMENT AND NOT TO MAKE DO WITH INTERIM AGREEMENTS." SHLOMZION LEADER, GENERAL (RES) ARIEL SHARON--"RABIN WENT TO THE US

FROM A POSITION OF WEAKNESS AND IS RETURNING EVEN
WEAKER. HIS ONLY ACHIEVEMENT WAS RENEWED AMERICAN
PRESSURE FOR WITHDRAWAL FROM JUDEA AND SAMARIA."
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Disposition Comment:
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